

LOCAL NEWS

Fewer Abilenians visit library, but more use online services



By [Brooke Crum](#) of the Abilene Reporter News

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Although fewer Americans may be visiting libraries, more Abilenians are using the resources offered by the Abilene Public Library, said Janis Test, the library's information services manager.

A recent Pew Research Center survey released Thursday indicates that fewer American adults visited a library during the past year. In 2012, 53 percent of respondents said they had. That number dropped

to 44 percent last year.

That trend holds true for the three Abilene library locations, which have seen a steady decrease in visitors since 2012, according to city figures.

In 2012, about 366,200 people visited the three branches. In 2015, the number of visitors dropped to 337,300.

"Not as many physical people are coming through our doors right now," Test said, "but our new downloadable resources we have ... are exploding in popularity."

Those resources include OverDrive, which allows library card holders to download e-books and audiobooks to their computers or compatible mobile devices; and Hoopla, a streaming service that offers an extensive collection of movies, audiobooks, music and e-books.

Another digital resource, Flipster, allows library patrons to browse popular magazines digitally on their computers or mobile devices.

Patrons also can browse more than 8,000 publications online through the Gale Virtual Reference Library.

Use of any of these resources requires a library card, which is free for Taylor County residents.

Test said combining the number of in-person visitors with those who use the online resources demonstrates the number of people using the library is increasing.

"People really enjoy the convenience of being able to utilize these things from home," she said. "In many cases, once they realize that we have these things that they can access from home 24/7/365, then they become more interested in our physical location."

The Pew survey also found that many adults are unaware that they can borrow e-books and take part in other programs at their local libraries.

"That's what libraries are about: free access to information and a place to gather, a place to talk, a place to learn in whatever form you do that, for free, for everybody," Test said.

The new South Branch of the Abilene Public Library being built in the Mall of Abilene could help increase the amount of visitors to the library, Test said. The convenient location in a high-traffic area offers it visibility. Plus, it will feature a new space just for teenagers to gather.

The location at the mall will replace the one on South Danville Drive.

"Libraries are changing," Test said. "We're more of a gathering place now."

Test said the Abilene Public Library does not focus on the numbers of visitors because it does not demonstrate how many people use the library's services, which is the model for progress the library is moving toward.

It's less about the numbers and more about the impact, she said.

About Brooke Crum

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